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#24

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THE MAXX

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MAXXIMIZED

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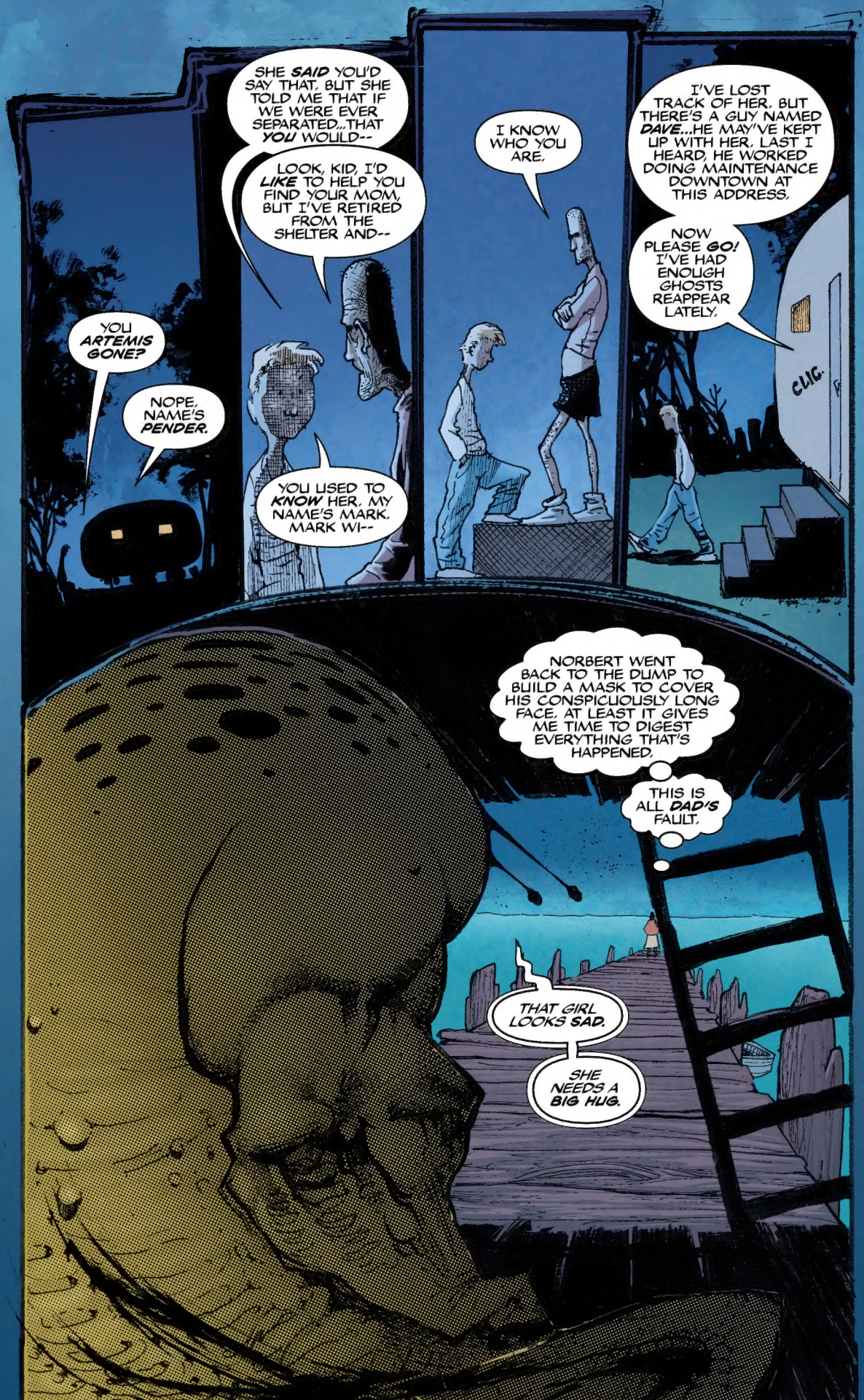
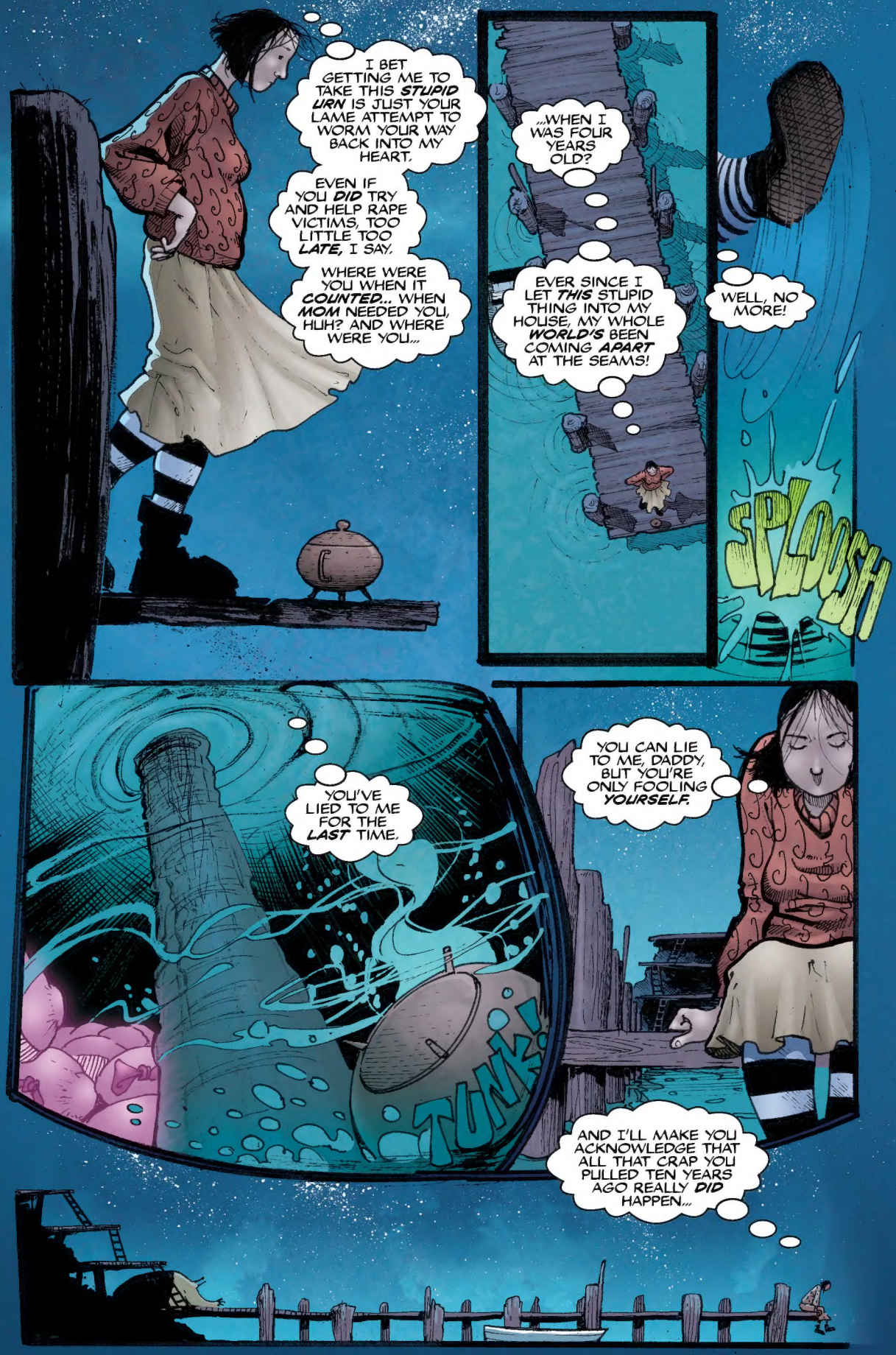
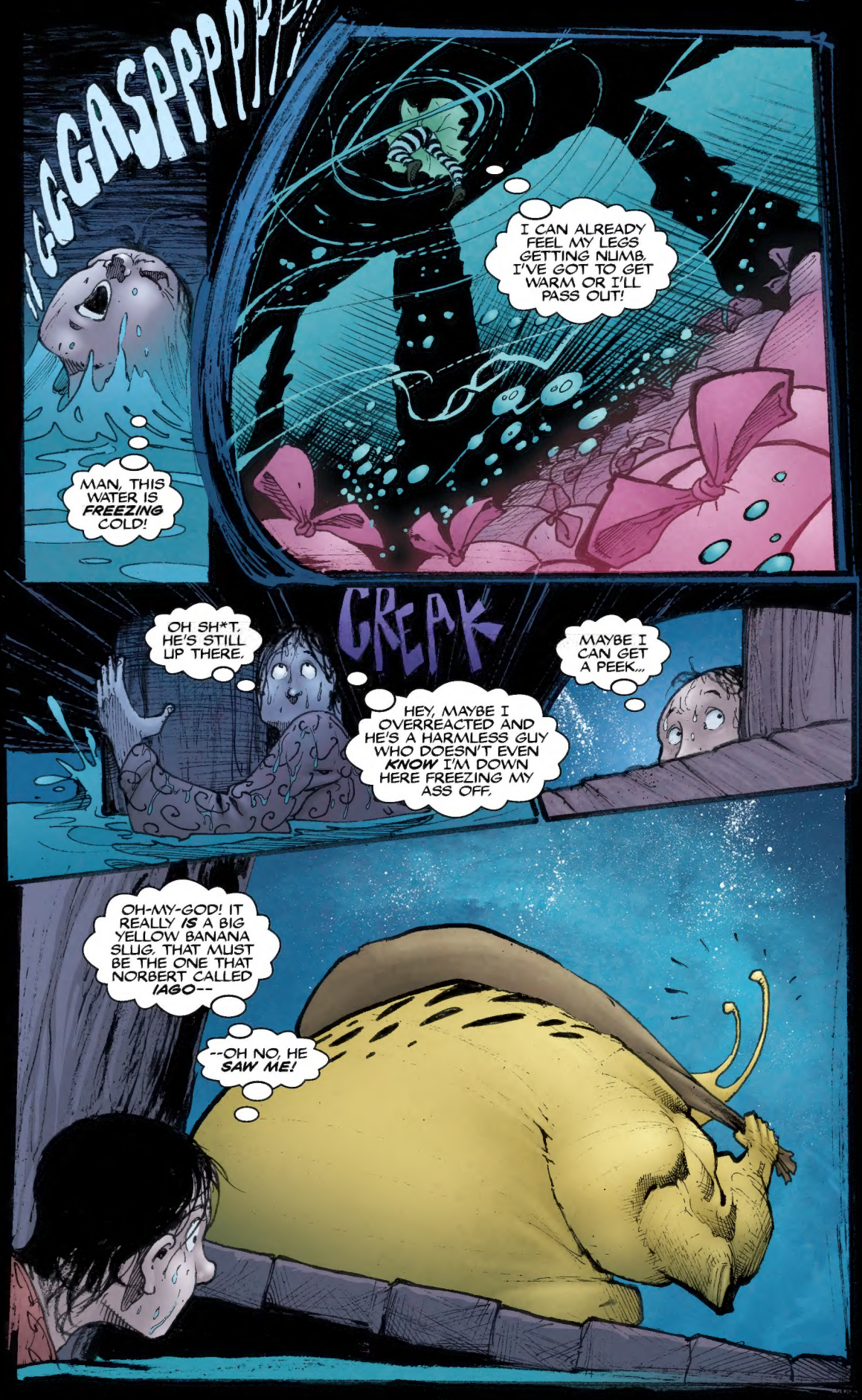
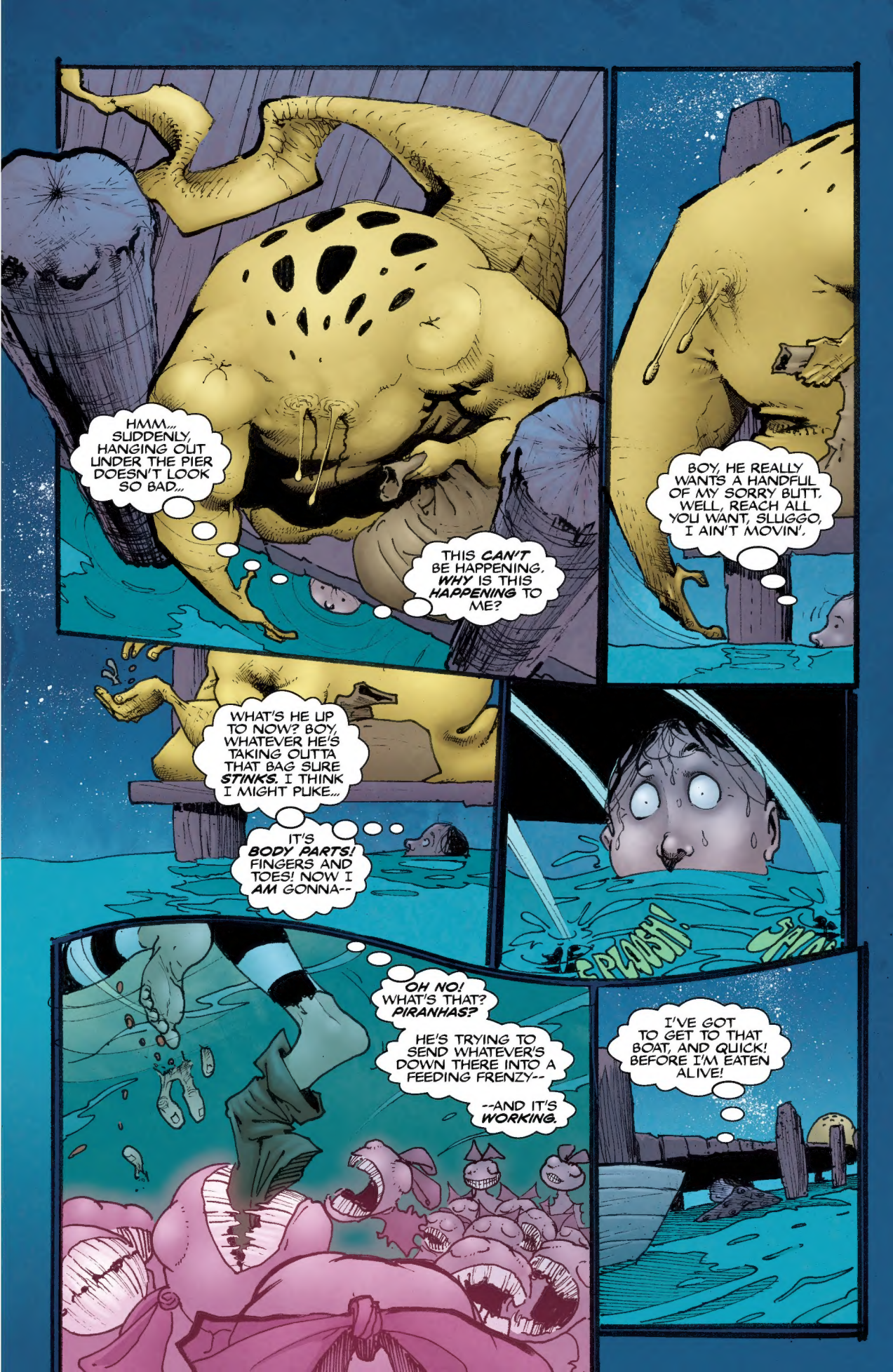

YOU ARTEMIS GONE?
NOPE, NAME'S PENDER.
SHE SAID YOU'D SAY THAT, BUT SHE TOLD ME THAT IF WE WERE EVER SEPARATED,,THAT YOU WOULD--
LOOK, KID, I'D LIKE TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR MOM, BUT I'VE RETIRED FROM THE SHELTER AND--
YOU USED TO KNOW HER, MY NAME'S MARK. MARK WI--
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
I'VE LOST TRACK OF HER, BUT THERE'S A GUY NAMED DAVE...HE MAY'VE KEPT UP WITH HER, LAST I HEARD, HE WORKED DOING MAINTENANCE DOWNTOWN AT THIS ADDRESS.
NOW PLEASE GO! I'VE HAD ENOUGH GHOSTS REAPPEAR LATELY.
CLIC.
NORBERT WENT BACK TO THE DUMP TO BUILD A MASK TO COVER HIS CONSPICUOUSLY LONG FACE. AT LEAST IT GIVES ME TIME TO DIGEST EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED.
THIS IS ALL DAD'S FAULT.
THAT GIRL LOOKS SAD.
SHE NEEDS A BIG HUG.


I BET GETTING ME TO TAKE THIS STUPID URN IS JUST YOUR LAME ATTEMPT TO WORM YOUR WAY BACK INTO MY HEART.
EVEN IF YOU DID TRY AND HELP RAPE VICTIMS, TOO LITTLE TOO LATE, I SAY.
WHERE WERE YOU WHEN IT COUNTED... WHEN MOM NEEDED YOU, HUH? AND WHERE WERE YOU...
...WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD?
EVER SINCE I LET THIS STUPID THING INTO MY HOUSE, MY WHOLE WORLD'S BEEN COMING APART AT THE SEAMS!
WELL, NO MORE!
SPLOOSH
YOU'VE LIED TO ME FOR THE LAST TIME.
TUNK!
YOU CAN LIE TO ME, DADDY, BUT YOU'RE ONLY FOOLING YOURSELF.
AND I'LL MAKE YOU ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL THAT CRAP YOU PULLED TEN YEARS AGO REALLY DID HAPPEN...

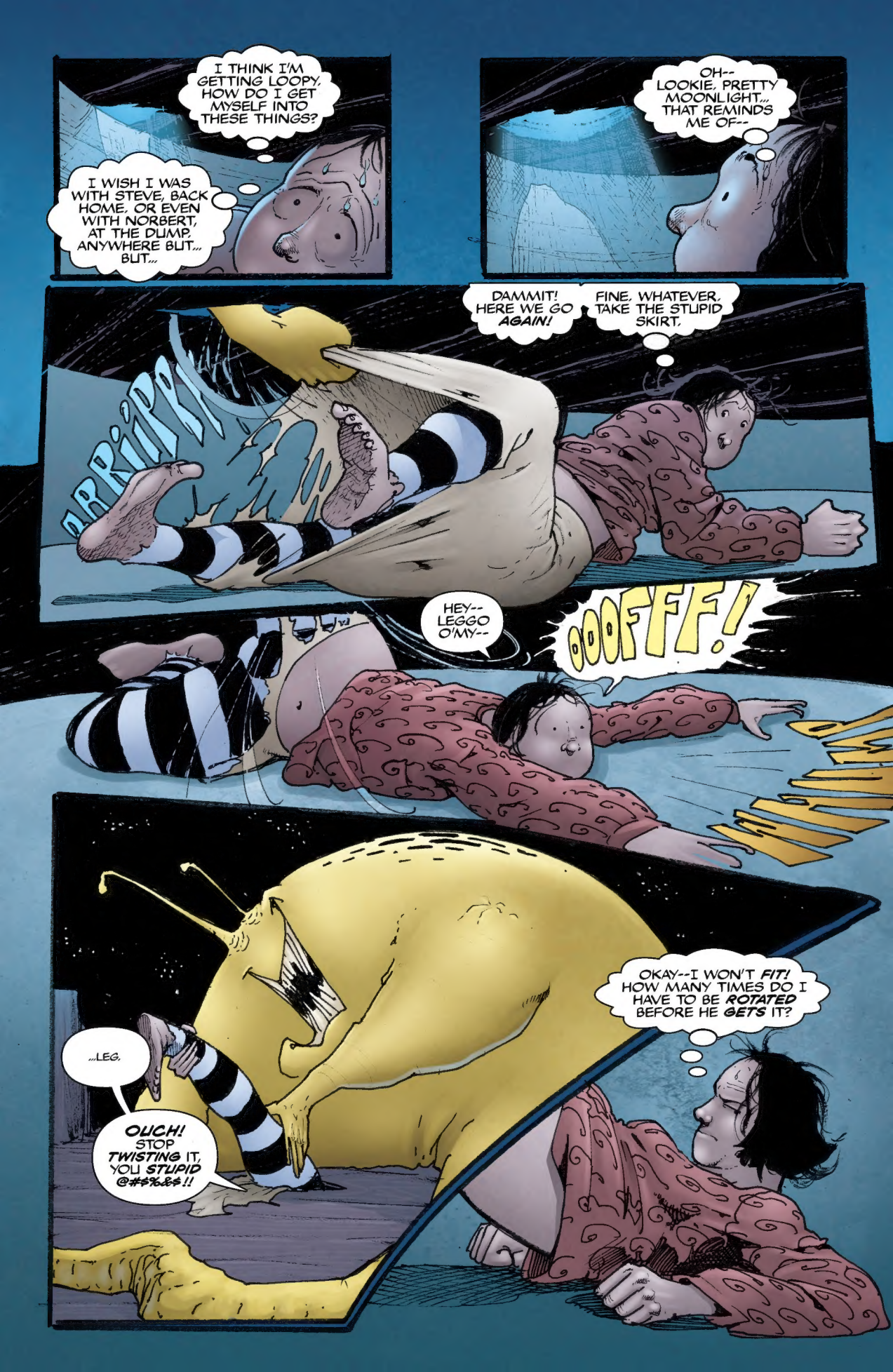
...IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO,
CREAK
SOMEBODY'S OUT HERE THIS LATE?
CREAK
OH, GREAT. SOME CREEP BLOCKING MY WAY BACK.
CREAK
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE SEEN ME...
OH CRAP!
CAN'T BREATHE!
DON'T PANIC!
CAN'T BREATHE!


GASPPPP!!
I CAN ALREADY FEEL MY LEGS GETTING NUMB. I'VE GOT TO GET WARM OR I'LL PASS OUT!
MAN, THIS WATER IS FREEZING COLD!
CREAK
OH SH*T. HE'S STILL UP THERE.
HEY, MAYBE I OVERREACTED AND HE'S A HARMLESS GUY WHO DOESN'T EVEN KNOW I'M DOWN HERE FREEZING MY ASS OFF.
MAYBE I CAN GET A PEEK...
OH-MY-GOD! IT REALLY IS A BIG YELLOW BANANA SLUG. THAT MUST BE THE ONE THAT NORBERT CALLED IAGO--
--OH NO, HE SAW ME!


HMM... SUDDENLY, HANGING OUT UNDER THE PIER DOESN'T LOOK SO BAD...
THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING. WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?
BOY, HE REALLY WANTS A HANDFUL OF MY SORRY BUTT. WELL, REACH ALL YOU WANT, SLUGGO, I AIN'T MOVIN'.
WHAT'S HE UP TO NOW? BOY, WHATEVER HE'S TAKING OUTTA THAT BAG SURE STINKS. I THINK I MIGHT PUKE...
IT'S BODY PARTS! FINGERS AND TOES! NOW I AM GONNA--
SPLOSH!
OH NO! WHAT'S THAT? PIRANHAS?
HE'S TRYING TO SEND WHATEVER'S DOWN THERE INTO A FEEDING FRENZY--
--AND IT'S WORKING.
I'VE GOT TO GET TO THAT BOAT, AND QUICK! BEFORE I'M EATEN ALIVE!

♫ DON'T RUN AWAY FROM YOUR FEELINGS, LITTLE GIRL... ♫
C'MON, SARA, HURRY! HURRY! GOTTA GET THIS THING UNDER THE PIER BEFORE...
THAT'S IT...
...KEEP GOING...
THERE!! SCREW YOU, BUDDY!
NOW IF I CAN STOP SHAKING, MAYBE I CAN CATCH MY BREATH AND THINK!
MY BEST BET IS TO KEEP THIS PIER BETWEEN ME AND HIM, AND SLOWLY WORK MY WAY BACK TO SHORE. THAT SHOULD WORK.
...YOU CAN "LOOKIE"...
THAT'S RIGHT, BUDDY...

...BUT NO "TOUCHIE".
MAN, THIS DUDE WON'T GIVE UP!
OKAY, LET'S SEE HOW YOU LIKE BEING PUSHED INTO A CORNER!
GRUNH
SO YOU DON'T LIKE IT EITHER, HUH?
I'D BETTER LET GO BEFORE YOU TRASH THE WHOLE PIER!
DON'T LOSE IT, SARA.
IGNORE THE CRAMPED SPACE.
IGNORE THE PIRANHAS.
JUST KEEP GOING TOWARD SHORE.


I THINK I'M GETTING LOOPY. HOW DO I GET MYSELF INTO THESE THINGS?
I WISH I WAS WITH STEVE, BACK HOME, OR EVEN WITH NORBERT, AT THE DUMP. ANYWHERE BUT... BUT...
OH-- LOOKIE, PRETTY MOONLIGHT... THAT REMINDS ME OF--
DAMMIT! HERE WE GO AGAIN!
FINE, WHATEVER. TAKE THE STUPID SKIRT.
aRRiPP!
HEY-- LEGGO O'MY--
OOOFFF!
OKAY--I WON'T FIT! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO BE ROTATED BEFORE HE GETS IT?
...LEG.
OUCH! STOP TWISTING IT, YOU STUPID @#$%&$!!

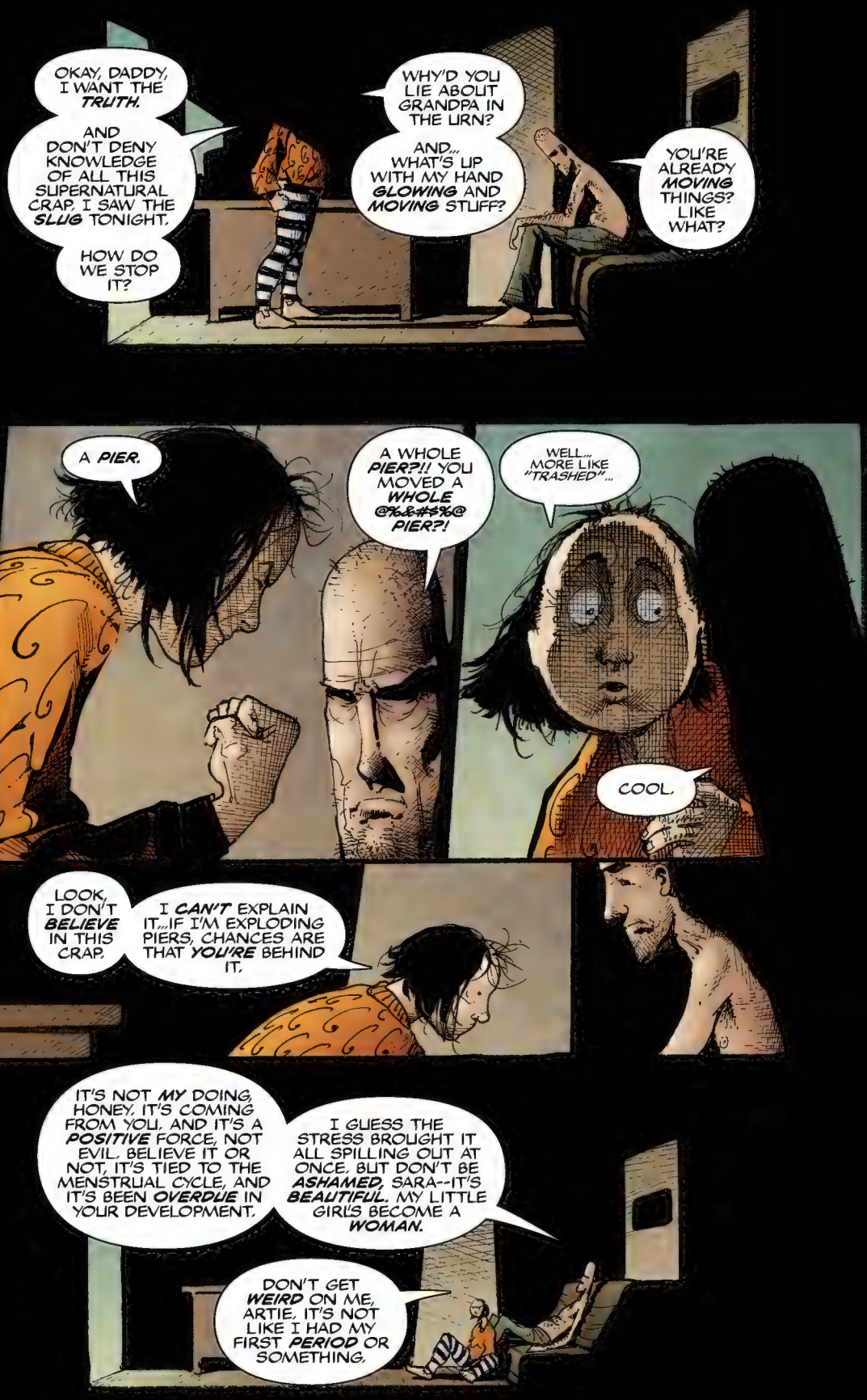
FINALLY! BOY, IS THIS SLUG DENSE! MAYBE NOW HE'LL LEAVE ME ALONE!
I CAN'T KEEP GOING LIKE THIS--I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO CRACK UP.
YOU KNOW, IF I WAS A WEAKER PERSON, I MIGHT HAVE BURST INTO TEARS BY NOW.
BUT IT'S GOING TO TAKE A LOT MORE THAN THIS TO...
WHIR
WELL, IF HE THINKS THROWING BODY PARTS WILL DRIVE ME OUT OF THIS BOAT--FAT CHANCE!
UNDERNEATH... SOMETHING'S... TRYING TO...
SPURT!
OH MAN! THEY CAN SMELL THE FINGERS!
PLOP!

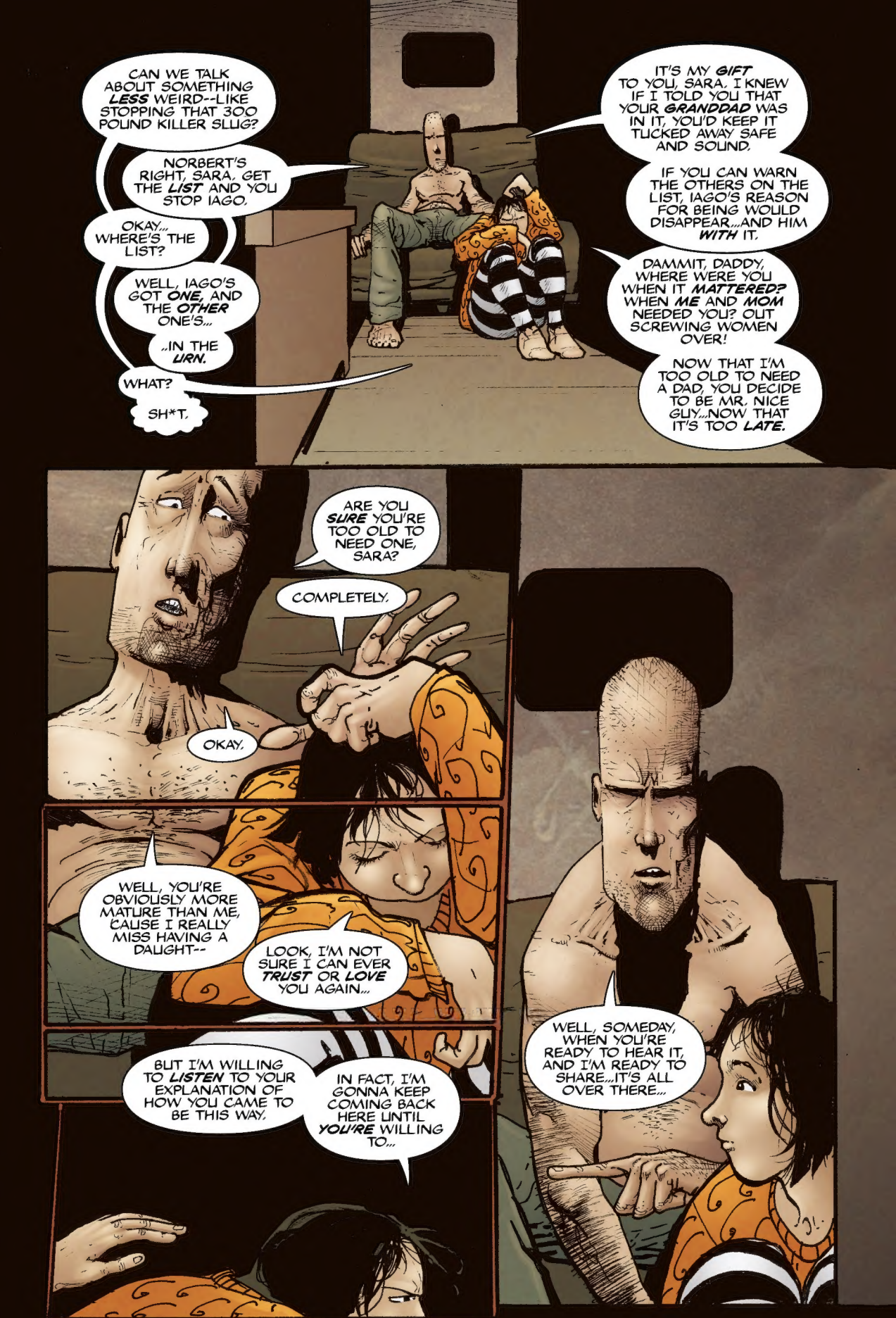
GREAT! NOW WATER'S LEAKING IN!
HE WANTS 'EM TO EAT RIGHT THROUGH THE BOAT, EH?
WELL, WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT THAT...
THERE! HAVE YOUR FEEDING FRENZY OVER THERE!
BOY, THEY'RE STARVED! LOOK AT 'EM!
SPLOOSH!
HMM... SINCE WHEN DO PIRANHAS HAVE BOWS ON THEIR HEADS?
AWW, SCREW IT! HE WANTS A FIGHT?
HE'S GONNA GET ONE.
CRASH
BOOM
OKAY, THIS IS IT...
...IT'S OVER.

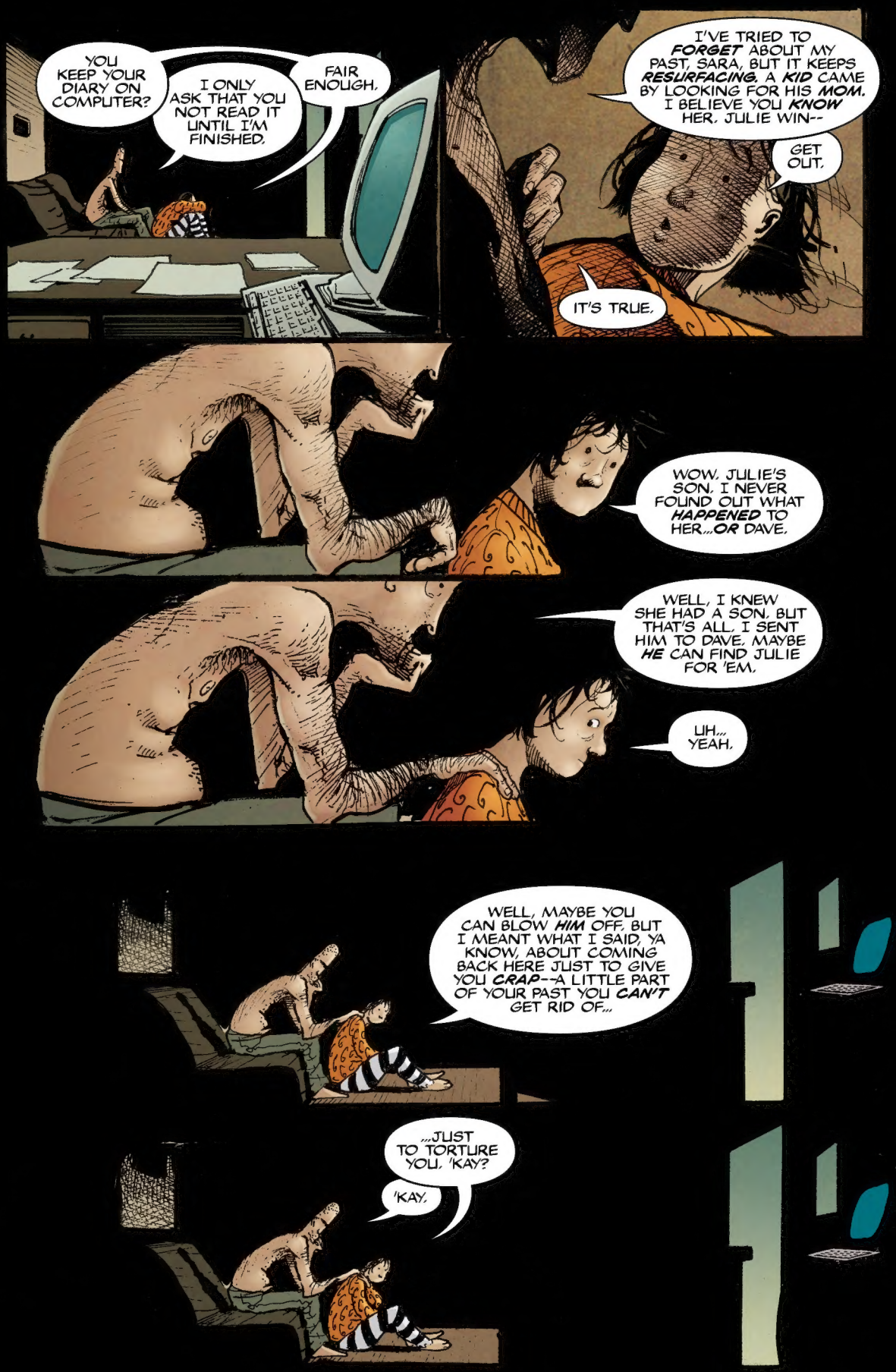
HOW BOUT A HUG?
C'MON, SUCKER, I'M READY...
?
?
FFFFSSTTT

OKAY, HERE'S MY CHANCE, WHILE HE'S HIDING...
...BUT WHAT'S UP WITH MY HAND? IT GLOWED?! AND I'M NOT EVEN DREAMING THIS TIME!
GOTCHA! IT WORKED! DIDN'T THINK I SAW YOU LOOKIN' AT ME, HUH?
TYING HIM IN A KNOT WON'T HOLD HIM FOR LONG...
...BUT MAYBE JUST...
...LONG ENOUGH...
PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT
PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT

SOMEBODY'S CRAAANKY...
GRAG
GO AHEAD, UNTIE YOURSELF...
...JUST STAY THE HELL AWAY FRO--
OOOFF!


OKAY, DADDY, I WANT THE TRUTH.
AND DON'T DENY KNOWLEDGE OF ALL THIS SUPERNATURAL CRAP. I SAW THE SLUG TONIGHT.
HOW DO WE STOP IT?
WHY'D YOU LIE ABOUT GRANDPA IN THE URN?
AND... WHAT'S UP WITH MY HAND GLOWING AND MOVING STUFF?
YOU'RE ALREADY MOVING THINGS? LIKE WHAT?
A PIER.
A WHOLE PIER?! YOU MOVED A WHOLE @%&#$%@ PIER?!
WELL... MORE LIKE "TRASHED"...
COOL.
LOOK, I DON'T BELIEVE IN THIS CRAP.
I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT... IF I'M EXPLODING PIERS, CHANCES ARE THAT YOU'RE BEHIND IT.
IT'S NOT MY DOING, HONEY. IT'S COMING FROM YOU. AND IT'S A POSITIVE FORCE, NOT EVIL. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, IT'S TIED TO THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE, AND IT'S BEEN OVERDUE IN YOUR DEVELOPMENT.
I GUESS THE STRESS BROUGHT IT ALL SPILLING OUT AT ONCE. BUT DON'T BE ASHAMED, SARA--IT'S BEAUTIFUL. MY LITTLE GIRL'S BECOME A WOMAN.
DON'T GET WEIRD ON ME, ARTIE. IT'S NOT LIKE I HAD MY FIRST PERIOD OR SOMETHING.


CAN WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING *LESS* WEIRD--LIKE STOPPING THAT 300 POUND KILLER SLUG?
NORBERT'S RIGHT, SARA. GET THE *LIST* AND YOU STOP IAGO.
OKAY... WHERE'S THE LIST?
WELL, IAGO'S GOT *ONE*, AND THE *OTHER* ONE'S...
...IN THE *URN*.
WHAT?
SH*T.
IT'S MY *GIFT* TO YOU, SARA. I KNEW IF I TOLD YOU THAT YOUR *GRANDDAD* WAS IN IT, YOU'D KEEP IT TUCKED AWAY SAFE AND SOUND.
IF YOU CAN WARN THE OTHERS ON THE LIST, IAGO'S REASON FOR BEING WOULD DISAPPEAR...AND HIM *WITH* IT.
DAMMIT, DADDY, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN IT *MATTERED?* WHEN *ME* AND *MOM* NEEDED YOU? OUT SCREWING WOMEN OVER!
NOW THAT I'M TOO OLD TO NEED A DAD, YOU DECIDE TO BE MR. NICE GUY...NOW THAT IT'S TOO *LATE*.
ARE YOU *SURE* YOU'RE TOO OLD TO NEED ONE, SARA?
COMPLETELY.
OKAY.
WELL, YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY MORE MATURE THAN ME, 'CAUSE I REALLY MISS HAVING A DAUGHT--
LOOK, I'M NOT SURE I CAN EVER *TRUST* OR *LOVE* YOU AGAIN...
BUT I'M WILLING TO *LISTEN* TO YOUR EXPLANATION OF HOW YOU CAME TO BE THIS WAY.
IN FACT, I'M GONNA KEEP COMING BACK HERE UNTIL *YOU'RE* WILLING TO...
WELL, SOMEDAY, WHEN YOU'RE READY TO HEAR IT, AND I'M READY TO SHARE...IT'S ALL OVER THERE...


YOU KEEP YOUR DIARY ON COMPUTER?
I ONLY ASK THAT YOU NOT READ IT UNTIL I'M FINISHED.
FAIR ENOUGH.
I'VE TRIED TO FORGET ABOUT MY PAST, SARA, BUT IT KEEPS RESURFACING. A KID CAME BY LOOKING FOR HIS MOM. I BELIEVE YOU KNOW HER. JULIE WIN--
GET OUT.
IT'S TRUE.
WOW. JULIE'S SON. I NEVER FOUND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HER...OR DAVE.
WELL, I KNEW SHE HAD A SON, BUT THAT'S ALL. I SENT HIM TO DAVE. MAYBE HE CAN FIND JULIE FOR 'EM.
UH... YEAH.
WELL, MAYBE YOU CAN BLOW HIM OFF, BUT I MEANT WHAT I SAID, YA KNOW, ABOUT COMING BACK HERE JUST TO GIVE YOU CRAP--A LITTLE PART OF YOUR PAST YOU CAN'T GET RID OF...
...JUST TO TORTURE YOU, 'KAY?
'KAY.

THIS GUY REALLY NEEDED A HUG.

HE ALREADY LOOKS... MORE RELAXED.

THAT LITTLE GIRL SUNK IAGO'S PIER. SHAME ON HER! NOW IAGO WILL HAVE TO FEED THE FAIRIES FROM A NEW ONE.

THREE MORE PEOPLE NEED HUGS AND ATTENTION, AND ONE THING'S FOR SURE...

...THE FAIRIES WON'T GO HUNGRY TONIGHT.